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SOTO'S FIREFIGHTER TRAINING BILL PASSES SENATE COMMITTEE

SB 1629 Focuses on Funding for Training Programs

Sacramento – While California grapples with regional paramedic and fire department problems of retaining qualified firefighter-paramedics, the need for funding fire service training is critical. In addition to training for day to day emergency calls, the firefighters need to be trained so they can handle disasters such as anthrax and biological terrorism. SB 1629, authored by Senator Nell Soto (D-Pomona), will steer federal money coming down the pike into proven public safety programs.

"It is evident that additional training modules are needed to prepare California's first responders for nuclear, biological and chemical attacks," says Senator Soto. "Our emergency personnel need to be prepared."

SB 1629 would allow the director of the Department of Health Services (DHS) to issue grants to local governments to help offset the cost of providing paramedic training for their fire service personnel. It would also allocate funds to the California Fire Fighters Joint Apprenticeship Program to defray expenses incurred as a result of paramedic training course development and instructional training.

"The recent focus on the life-saving role of our nation's first responders has brought new attention to the ongoing challenge of recruiting and training qualified paramedics," says Yvonne De La Pena, program director for the California Fire Fighter Joint Apprenticeship Committee. "In some regions of the state, smaller departments are having trouble retaining their best and brightest, who are being lured away by larger, better funded departments. The impact of these shortages can be summed up in two words: response time."

The California Professional Firefighters and the State Fire Marshall support this bill.

SB 1629 now goes to Senate Appropriations.

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